





Facts as Strange as Fiction.

COMPLIMENTS.

ROUMELIAN COUP D'ÉTAT, SERVO-BULGARIAN WAR, AND THE LATEST PHASE OF THE EASTERN QUESTION.

By R. HAMILTON LANG.



ALEXANDER, PRINCE OF BULGARIA.

London:
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P R E F A C E.

AN explanation may be expected for the publication of this pamphlet. It is the reproduction of a lecture which I delivered in Inverness on the 16th of February last, and in Glasgow on the 8th of March. I was then requested to publish it, but had not at the time the leisure necessary to do so. Many of those who heard the lecture may notice the absence of several anecdotes with which I sought to enliven it. Their insertion in the published text did not appear to me requisite.

The delay in publication has been advantageous in one respect. The issue of a most interesting Blue Book on the affairs of Eastern Roumelia and Bulgaria enables me to append, in the form of notes, authentic confirmation of many statements, which thus no longer require to go forth to the public on my own authority. In a general way I may add that that Blue Book demonstrates forcibly not only the success and wisdom of the Eastern Roumelian policy pursued by Lord Salisbury, but also the remarkable tact and patience with which it was carried out by Sir William White. Single-handed, the British Foreign Secretary carried out a generous policy towards a small State, determined to shake herself free of a foreign tutelage, and, thanks to the ability and patient perseverance of his representative at Constantinople, he was enabled to do so without ruffling the susceptibilities of the other Great Powers whose projects he was stultifying.

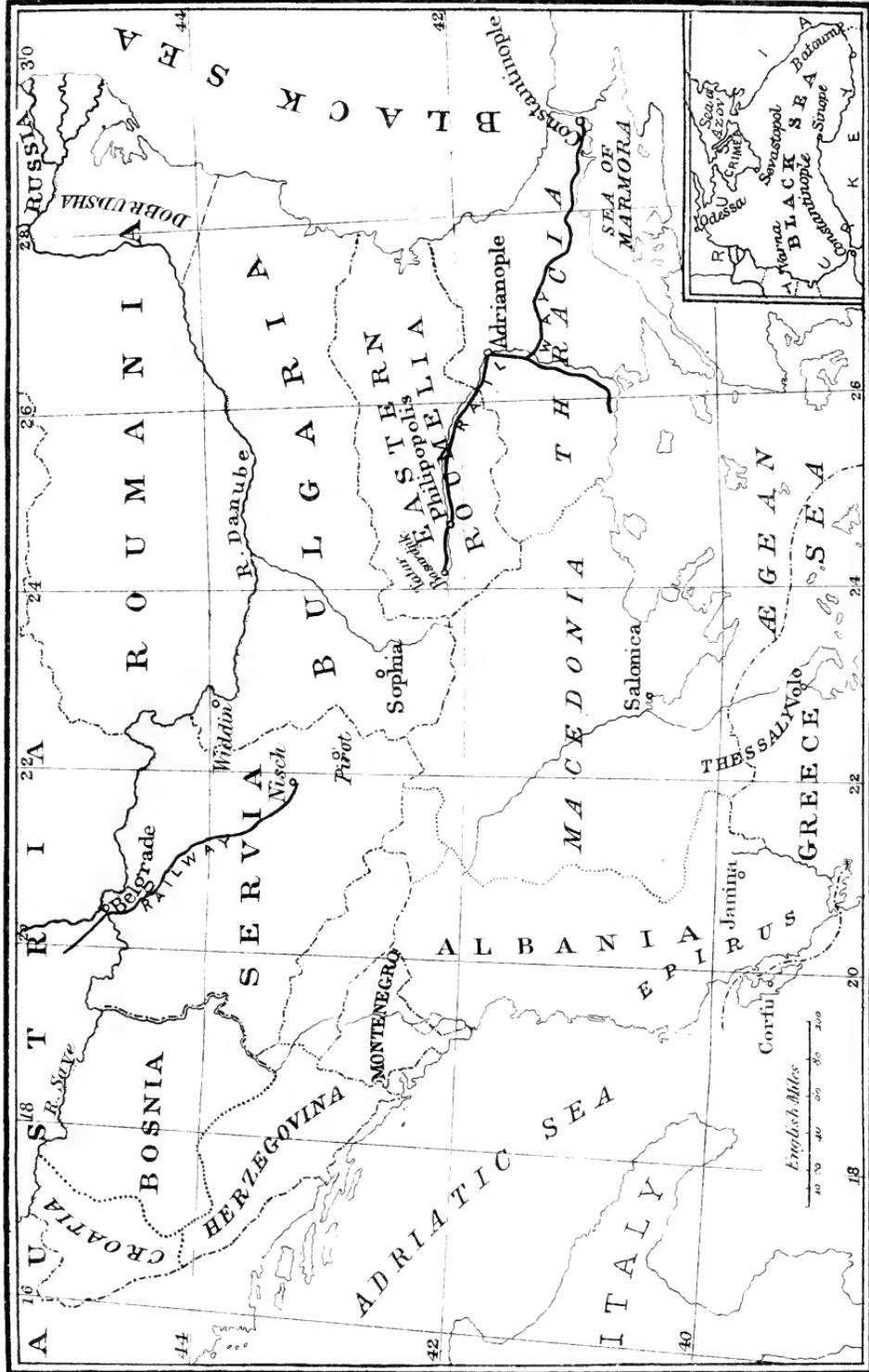
The "Eastern Question" has entered upon a new and interesting phase, which it is of importance that the British public should clearly understand.

R. HAMILTON LANG.

Pila Lodge, South Norwood Park, S.E.,
14th June, 1886.



EASTERN EUROPE



ROUMELIAN COUP D'ÉTAT.

I.

DESCRIPTION AND POLITICAL SITUATION OF EASTERN EUROPE.

BEFORE describing the events which have recently transpired in Eastern Roumelia, it is advantageous to give you a clear conception of what we call "Eastern Europe." It comprises all the territory in Europe on the south side of the Danube from its mouths up to Belgrade (in *Servia*), and along the south side of the river Save up to the frontiers of Croatia (*part of Austria proper*). All this vast territory, until after the last Turco-Russian War, formed part of the Turkish Empire, and, with the exception of Servia already quasi-independent, it was ruled over by The Sultan, through governors nominated by him. You will remember that the first result of that war between Turkey and Russia was the Treaty of San Stephano, forced upon defeated Turkey by victorious Russia as a basis of peace, without the intervention of the other Great Powers of Europe.

By that Treaty the provinces of Bulgaria and Eastern Roumelia were constituted into a United Principality, which included the Balkan range of mountains, a long line of defence of great natural strength, and, indeed, the only naturally strong line of defence between the Danube and Constantinople. The arrangements of that Treaty did not, however, suit Austria, as a Great Power, nor Greece and Servia, as little States, and naturally they did not suit Turkey if she could avoid them. On the part of England Lord Beaconsfield objected to them because

they left Constantinople at the mercy of Russia whenever she willed to advance upon that capital through Bulgaria. Lord Beaconsfield wished to give Turkey a chance of preserving a strong position in Europe, which the possession of the Balkans might enable her to do. In consequence of the energetic action of England, Russia consented to assist at a Conference of the Great Powers, held in Berlin, to fix by an International compact the territorial arrangements resulting from the defeat of Turkey by Russia. The International compact established by that Conference is called the Treaty of Berlin. It regulated the situation of Eastern Europe, and consequently it is of importance that we understand clearly its leading dispositions.*

- 1st. Starting from the mouths of the Danube we have a corner of territory called the Dobrutscha, which is formed by the Danube, from below Silistria, running northwards instead of eastwards. This corner was given to Roumania in compensation for the Roumanian part of Bessarabia demanded by Russia. We will not need further to occupy ourselves with this province, which remains quietly in the possession of Roumania.
- 2nd. We have the province of Bulgaria, which was formed into a Principality, and of which Alexander of Battenberg was later on chosen to be the Prince. The northern frontier of this province carries us up the Danube to a little above Widdin.
- 3rd. We have Servia, which was recognised to be an entirely independent State, and later on, with the consent of the Powers, declared itself a kingdom under its Prince, who became King Milan. The northern boundaries of Servia run along the Danube to Belgrade, and thence along the river Save, a tributary of the Danube, to a little above Mitrovitza.

* See Map on other side.

- 4th. We have Bosnia and Herzegovina, which were handed over to Austria to be occupied and administered by her. These two provinces are shut out from the Adriatic Sea by Dalmatia, belonging to Austria.
- 5th. South of Bulgaria, and separated from it by the Balkan range of mountains, lies Eastern Roumelia, which was erected into an autonomous province of Turkey, and for which a Constitution was devised by a European Commission. The Sultan was to name its Governor-General, with the sanction of the Great Powers. He was to be a Christian, and to rule according to the Constitution or organic statute just mentioned.
- 6th. Greece, who had taken no part in the Russo-Turkish War, but threatened to give trouble to Turkey just at its close, was to have a rectification of her frontiers on the side of Turkey, and the Powers agreed to offer their mediation between Turkey and Greece in the event of differences arising in the negotiations. Greece thus obtained a good slice of the Turkish province of Thessaly at the most southern corner of Eastern Europe.
- 7th. Turkey was left with direct rule over the rest of Eastern Europe, excepting the little mountainous plot belonging to Montenegro, whose sturdy mountaineers had fought for and acquired their independence long before the Turco-Russian War. With that exception and the part of Thessaly ceded to Greece, you will notice that Turkey retained all the most southern part of Eastern Europe and held direct power over the seabords of the Adriatic below Dalmatia, the Ægean, the Dardanelles, the Sea of Marmora, the Bosphorus, and the European side of the Black Sea from a little below Bourgas (Roumelia). As near as may be, the half of Eastern

Europe was severed from Turkey. All the territory given to Austria, Servia, and Bulgaria looks south, and the ambitions of these three countries are all towards the seaboard of the *Ægean*. They all desire its invigorating sea-breezes, and cast longing eyes upon the rich plains which lie between them and it. This land left in the hands of Turkey resembles a tempting morsel of cheese lying within sight of three hungry mice. Between Servia and Eastern Roumelia a corner of Bulgaria comes down and forms a wedge between the two. This wedge is all the facing towards the *Ægean* which Bulgaria received. In that wedge lies Sophia, the capital of Bulgaria.

Keep always in view the *Ægean* as the goal of the ambitions of Austria, Servia, and Bulgaria, and you have the key to the recent fighting between Servia and Bulgaria. While Bulgaria remained separate from Eastern Roumelia, and Eastern Roumelia belonged to Turkey, Servia had no dread of the ambitions of Bulgaria; because in the event of the latter State menacing Macedonia the Bulgarian wedge could always effectively be acted on by Turkey on the one side and Servia on the other. But supposing Eastern Roumelia to become united to Bulgaria the two form a solid square, menacing both Macedonia and Thrace, and capable of cutting off absolutely Servia from sight of the seaboard of the *Ægean*. It was therefore essential to the ambitions of both Austria and Servia that Eastern Roumelia should not unite with Bulgaria. Greece away down in the southern corner of Eastern Europe looked up for more land northwards to Macedonia, which was especially coveted because it had been the birthplace and kingdom of Alexander the Great, of blessed memory in Greek hearts. If anybody was to have Macedonia she wanted it, but she could accommodate her views to the desires of Austria and Servia, and be satisfied with an advance of frontier on the

side of Macedonia and the extension of her territory westwards in Epirus, in face of Corfu.

Eastern Roumelia was too small to have any independent longings, and besides, she was by the Treaty left attached to Turkey. With the exception of an insignificant number of Mussulmans and Greeks her population is Bulgarian in race, language, and sympathy—indeed so thoroughly Bulgarian that a stranger can scarcely perceive any difference between the two peoples. Too small to accomplish anything great alone, the ambition of Eastern Roumelia was to connect herself with Bulgaria—disunite herself from Turkey and share in the future fortunes of her larger brother.

Such was the position created in Eastern Europe by the Treaty of Berlin, and you will notice how each of the parties benefited, naturally gravitate towards Macedonia and Thrace, left in the possession of Turkey. Excepting Turkey all were placed in positions which only satisfied them temporarily, but the ambitions of each required that no one of them should move out of the limits indicated to it by the Treaty of Berlin; whichever made a move became the enemy of the others, until the happy time to which all looked forward when a fresh spoliation of Turkey by common consent was possible.

I will now proceed to show you how Eastern Roumelia worked to effect her union with Bulgaria, and in doing so set all the dogs of the quarter barking.

II.

HOW EASTERN ROUMELIA WORKED TO EFFECT HER UNION
WITH BULGARIA.

ALEKO PASHA VOGORIDES was the first Governor-General of Eastern Roumelia. He was a Bulgarian by birth, and of a princely family of ancient renown in Bulgaria. Notwithstanding his Bulgarian blood and strong patriotic proclivities, he very honestly discharged the delicate *rôle* which he was called upon to play as representative of the Sultan. Turkey was satisfied with him; the Roumeliotes were fairly so, as were all the Great Powers, with the exception of Russia. An amusing incident occurred when he took possession of his post. Aleko Pasha left the presence of the Sultan wearing on his head a Turkish Fez. When he arrived at the Eastern Roumelian frontier the Roumeliotes provided him with a Bulgarian cap, called a "kalpak," which he donned, laying aside the "fez," and so attired he entered the capital of Eastern Roumelia. The incident produced a sensation in Turkish circles, and threatened to cause trouble. Aleko pleaded in excuse that he had received no orders on the subject of his dress, and that, taken by surprise, he did not like to mar the harmony of his first reception for the matter of a headdress. Profuse expressions of devotion to the Sultan enabled him to escape from the awkward dilemma, but the incident, as a straw shows how the wind blows, pointed clearly whither the aspirations of the Roumeliotes lay. Had Aleko Pasha been an intriguer and a strong man, Roumelia might have given a future Prince to Bulgaria, instead of the German Prince of Bulgaria becoming the chosen of the Roumeliotes. But, although an honest, good man, Aleko was not of the type to attempt great things. I have said that he did not please Russia.

The real reason was not avowed, but Russia doubtless found out that it did not suit her game that a patriotic Bulgarian should rule in Eastern Roumelia. In giving Bulgaria a nominal independence, she did not intend that Bulgaria should have independent national aspirations, but remain a useful pawn, handy in her Eastern game. However this may be, when Aleko Pasha's first term of office was about to expire, the Russian Consul picked a quarrel with him about some trumpery questions, and this was made the pretext of Russia's refusing to sanction his reappointment.* Long negotiations between the Powers and the Sublime Porte ended in the choice of a simple-minded nobody, named Gavril Chrestovich, who had been Aleko Pasha's secretary. No one could count upon him for much, as he was simply a nullity of respectable appearance. Russia thus got rid of the Bulgarian nobleman who was too honest for her purposes, and replaced him by an unpretentious individual who owed his position to her influence. The Roumeliotes had found out that Aleko Pasha was too timid to play their game, and saw put in his place, with satisfaction, a well-dressed doll, around which they could prepare their plots without fear or restraint.

In August of last year it was thought well that Gavril Pasha should visit Constantinople, on the pretext of settling some affairs with the Porte. He did so, remaining there about three weeks and returning to Philippopolis on the 13th of September. Much had been concocted in his absence of which he was quite ignorant. He was well received by his people,

* "Aleko Pasha was got rid of by the Russians for being Anti-Russian, and Gavril Pasha, who has just been deposed, was simply a Russian Agent, and for that reason he was overthrown."—Dr. Stranski to Major Trotter, Blue Book, page 66.

At the third meeting of the Conference the Russian Minister said: "In Bulgaria wise counsels have not prevailed. The national sentiment has there been made use of by agitators. . . . In Eastern Roumelia, under the first Governor-General, the party in power encouraged this tendency."—Blue Book, page 245.

but many who flattered him with vain compliments must have laughed in their sleeves at the farce they were preparing for him. On the Thursday following, the 17th, a little row was got up about the collection of taxes at a village near the capital. The Prefect of Police hastened to the spot, but was put under arrest by the villagers. Next morning the rails at the Turkish frontier were lifted and the telegraph wires cut. Thus isolated from the outer world the Unionists proceeded to carry out their little game at the capital. What happened there was graphically described by an Englishman who had arrived at Philippopolis on the previous day, intending to continue his journey on the morrow. He went to bed without any notion of what was brewing. The town was perfectly quiet, and neither from our Consul nor from any one did he hear of anything disquieting. Next morning, about five o'clock, he was aroused by an unusual stir in the street, and on looking out he saw passing an open carriage in which was being paraded His Excellency Gavril Pasha, with a woman in full Bulgarian costume seated by his side. In this playful and harmless way the Governor-General of Roumelia was transported from the Government House to a private residence in a village near by, where he was requested to consider himself under arrest. A second carriage transported the Chief of the Gendarmerie, a pompous German who had also been named by the Sultan.* The town was *en fête*. The union of Roumelia with Bulgaria was proclaimed, and the

* "At 2 o'clock on Friday morning the soldiers, led by Major Nicolaïeff, fired a volley to awaken the town, and then proceeded to the Square, where they were met by Drigalski Pasha with a small body of troops, who had, however, been secretly instructed not to obey his orders. Drigalski Pasha was put under arrest, and Major Nicolaïeff placed himself at the head of the army. It was now 4 o'clock in the morning, and a proclamation declaring that the union of Eastern Roumelia and Bulgaria had been accomplished was already printed, and copies dispersed throughout the town. A deputation was sent to inform the Governor-General of what had taken place and request him to leave the town. He was then ignominiously paraded through the streets in a carriage past the Russian Consulate, after which he was conveyed to Konaré, and a few days later to Sophia."—Despatch of Acting Consul, Blue Book, page 37.

cessation of Turkish rule. The ringleaders of the movement formed themselves into a Provisional Government and resolved to request the Prince of Bulgaria to accept the homages of the Roumelian people and consider them his faithful subjects. The whole scene had passed off as a cleverly played charade. The popular enthusiasm knew no bounds. Not a voice of opposition had been heard, no discordant note had marred the universal harmony.* So well had the plans been laid and their secret kept that the *coup d'état* burst upon the world as an incredible surprise. The Russian Consul, as much in darkness as the rest of the world,† proceeded to declare to the ringleaders the disapprobation of his Government, and to remind them of the grave consequences which would follow their acts. They replied that they could not believe in the opposition of the great Czar, who had done so much for the Bulgarian people.

If we are to credit the solemn word of the Prince of Bulgaria (and I do) the *coup d'état* came upon him unexpectedly. He described his position as that of a dilemma. The enthusiasm in Bulgaria was as great as in Roumelia. Had he refused the unexpected honour the Prince virtually threw away his Bulgarian Princedom, which he had no wish to do.‡ So he telegraphed to the Sultan informing him of the desire of the Roumeliotes, and adding that although he had been no party to the movement he could not oppose it. The promptitude of his decision did credit both to his head and his heart.

* "The upsetting of the existing Government was accomplished with the most perfect order."—Colonel Trotter, Blue Book, page 44.

† Count Kalnoky said "movement had been organized in Bulgaria, but without the connivance or knowledge of either the Emperor or Government of Russia, whom he believed it would take as much by surprise as it certainly had him."—Despatch of Sir A. Paget, 20th September, Blue Book, page 3.

‡ "The Prince has joined us; he had no other alternative but to do so or to abdicate."—Dr. Stransky, 21st September, Blue Book, page 50. "I had not the faintest expectation of what was going to occur, nor indeed, until last Friday morning, when I received news at Varna of the *coup d'état*."—The Prince to Major Trotter, Blue Book, page 64.

III.

LOSS OF THE MOMENT FOR ACTION BY TURKEY.

WHILE the Roumeliotes and Bulgarians were intoxicated with enthusiastic joy great was the stir in the outer world. The fear which came uppermost in the minds of the Sultan and his Ministers, and indeed of every one, was that Russia was in the plot, and that she must have been the string-puller in the stirring drama which had been enacted. It was little known how profoundly the Bulgarians chafed under the yoke of their Russian protectors.* Few could suppose that, unaided by or without advice from the Power which posed as the protector of Bulgaria, the Roumeliotes would have dared so much. Nevertheless, the Russian Ambassador, after having communicated with St. Petersburg, hastened to inform the Sublime Porte officially that what had happened in Roumelia was without the knowledge and without the approval of his Government.†

Now was the moment of action for Turkey. The Treaty of Berlin had provided that in any emergency endangering the internal or external security of Eastern Roumelia the Sultan was authorized to send troops into the province. He was thus made the custodian of the Treaty's dispositions in regard to Eastern Roumelia, and that their defence should be prompt the Treaty gave the Sultan, in anticipation, authority to act. Very clearly such an emergency as the Treaty foresaw to be possible

* "This revolution was directed against Russian tutelage, as it had become intolerable."—Dr. Stransky to Consul-General Fawcett, Blue Book, page 49.

† Prince Alexander telegraphed to Czar, " You love the Bulgarian nation, I therefore hope you will approve what I have done." Czar replied, " It is because I love the Bulgarian nation that I disapprove what you have done."—Despatch, Sir F. Malet, Blue Book, page 6.

had arisen. The Treaty had been torn up, its stipulations ignored, the legal Governor-General arrested, and all connection with Turkey violently severed. Incredible although it had appeared at first sight, all this had been accomplished by a popular rising, destitute of any influential backing, and without the advice of any of the Great Powers. To many it seemed intolerable that an insignificant people, chiefly half-civilized peasants, with absolutely no military force to aid them, should coolly drive a carriage-and-pair through a solemn Treaty which all the Great Powers of Europe with infinite labour had devised, and by many acts had shown their determination to have respected. These half-civilized peasants had calmly put under arrest the representative of the Sultan, the nominee of all the Great Powers, and had even associated with this act circumstances of playful bravado. Yet so it was. There is something superb, when we look back upon it, in the apparent unconsciousness on the part of these impetuous peasants of the colossal greatness of the Powers which they simply ignored, and of the solemn nature of the international covenant which they set at naught, just as a chubby-faced boy lays hold irreverently of his stately father's beard or tears into shreds, with quiet satisfaction, the pages of the most sacred Book.

The punishment of this extraordinary audacity seemed easy, and the duty devolved upon Turkey. Said Pasha, the Sultan's Grand Vizier, was a man of clear views, and was not lacking in resolution. He was neither German nor Russian in his proclivities. His great aim had always been—and from a Turkish standpoint it was a patriotic one—to diminish all foreign interference, and to strengthen the legitimate influence of his Government in the country by a policy which consulted only Turkish interests. As soon as Said Pasha felt assured that Russia was not only not in the game of the Roumelian Unionists, but also abhorred its presumption, he promptly decided upon active measures, and in a Council of Ministers obtained for these measures the approval of all his colleagues

without exception. He proposed to withdraw from the well-appointed garrison of Constantinople six thousand men, and despatch them at once to occupy the capital of Eastern Roumelia. When by this occupation he had put himself in the position of *Beati possidentes*, he then proposed to consult with the Powers as to future action.* No objection could possibly be made to this proceeding by any of the Powers, because Turkey was thereby simply executing the clearly expressed disposition of the Treaty of Berlin in its 16th Article. And there is little doubt that had the decision been promptly carried out, not a dog would have barked at the soldiers of the army of occupation, for in Eastern Roumelia there were only a few undisciplined policemen, without their European chief, to oppose them.† The Prince of Bulgaria was prudent enough not to bring any Bulgarian troops into Roumelia until he saw what action Turkey was about to take, and had that action been the advance of six thousand Turkish regulars it is a moral certainty that the Bulgarian soldiers would have stayed at home.‡ The proposition of the Council of Ministers was submitted to the Sultan for approval on the 23rd September, but there it stuck.

* This Ministerial decision is indicated in a telegraphic despatch of Assim Pasha to the Turkish Ambassador at the Court of St. James', under date 23rd September, in which, after relating with great clearness the situation, it is said : "The Ottoman Government cannot regard with indifference a situation of such gravity. Therefore, strong in their natural rights and duties, they feel bound, in virtue of the power conferred upon them by Article XVI of the Treaty of Berlin, to put an end to these disturbances, and to reinstate the province in the position accorded to it by this international act."—Blue Book, page 10.

† Consul-General Fawcett, in writing to the Marquis of Salisbury, says : "We were obliged to give our parole not to state the number nor positions of the Roumelian troops. It is, however, well known that *they possess only four cannon and but little ammunition*. There will probably be a large undisciplined body of armed men collected, but I much doubt if they can make any serious resistance to Turkish regulars."—Blue Book, page 18.

‡ Philippopolis, 28th September. "Three thousand regular troops arrived this evening from Sophia."—Telegraphic despatch, Willmore, Blue Book, page 34.

The Governmental system in Turkey is very different from that to which we are accustomed. Under the present Sultan it has become much more autocratic than it has been since the days of Sultan Mahmoud. Abd-ul-Medgid was so much of an exhausted sensualist that he was unable to follow, as Sultan Mahmoud had done before him, the affairs of the Empire. A monarch who had some two hundred wives and concubines to look after may be excused if he had not leisure to devote to mental work. Although resembling Solomon in one respect he was unlike him in intellectual capacity. In consequence, during the reign of Sultan Abd-ul-Medgid, the Ministers, who represent what is called the Sublime Porte, acquired more power, and it was really *they* who directed the administration and diplomacy of the Empire. Amongst them were fortunately men of remarkable ability such as the Pashas Reschid, Fuad, and Ali. Sultan Abd-ul-Aziz, who succeeded Abd-ul-Medgid, although a much stronger man physically, was fond of pleasure and had no head for business. Under him the Sublime Porte retained its power. But the present Sultan is a plodding, indefatigable worker—indeed I should say he is the most hard-working Sovereign in Europe. His whole time from early morning to late night is consecrated to the affairs of State. Every scheme, great or small, which occupies the attention of his Ministers is scrutinized by him even to its most minute details. Thanks to this untiring devotion to work, the present Sultan Abd-ul-Hamid has been able to concentrate all important action in his own hands. When any great emergency occurs, the Ministers are called to the Palace and there remain at the disposal of the Sultan, eating and often sleeping at Yildiz. When the Sultan thinks fit he summonses notables of the nation, civil, military, and religious, to meet with his Ministers and consult with them. These meetings are said to be held under the Presidency of the Sultan, but in reality they are generally held in a room contiguous to that of the Sovereign, and one of the chamberlains informs the Sultan of the course of the debates, and carries to

the Assembly the thoughts of his master. Such a system would be thought by us to be an intolerable waste of time, but in a country where neither the Press nor free discussion prepares men's minds to arrive at decisions, this lengthened period of gestation is necessary and often advantageous. As an example of the absorbing nature of a Turkish Minister's duties, I may mention that a few days after the news of the Roumelian *coup d'état* I called at the present Prime Minister's house, and was told by the servant that his master had remained at the Palace during three days and nights without returning to see his family. Fancy Mr. Gladstone or Lord Salisbury and all their colleagues being kept at Windsor during three consecutive days and nights deliberating in the ante-room of the Queen !

Said Pasha had been Grand Vizier during the long period of six years with only two short intervals, the last of which was only of twenty-four hours' duration. His long enjoyment of the favour of his Sovereign made Said think he could venture to initiate some important financial reforms, which in Turkey means stopping the pilfering of influential persons in the provinces. Just before the Roumelian revolt broke out, Said began his financial reforms by removing all control of the provincial treasuries from the Governors and making the financial agents directly responsible to the Ministry of Finance. Thereupon the intriguers against him at the Palace redoubled their efforts, and rumours became rife that the Grand Vizier was to be changed. Had no exceptional emergency occurred, I doubt not the patriotism of the Sultan—for patriotism is indeed one of his most distinguishing characteristics—would have led him to remain true to his Minister. But it was in this atmosphere of double-charged intrigue that the counsel of Said Pasha for energetic action in Roumelia was submitted to the Sultan. After a delay of forty-eight hours Said Pasha was dismissed, and the Sultan decided not to take any action until he was authorized by the Great Powers. This policy of inaction was suicidal to Turkey, but great luck to the Roumeliotes. As an

able diplomatist of our country said, "it was a woful declaration of weakness, which could not fail to encourage all the many turbulent spirits in the Empire." To understand why this momentous decision was taken by the Sultan, we must realize a variety of coincidences which exercised a powerful influence on the mind of His Majesty.

When the *coup d'état* in Roumelia broke upon him as a surprise the Sultan became very wroth with his Ministers for allowing such an event to occur without their cognizance; indeed, perhaps he may have been disposed for a moment to doubt their ignorance. A week before the event occurred, rumours had been rife about the Palace that a leading military Pasha was disaffected towards the throne, and on no point is the Sultan more sensitive. At a time when his fears had thus been aroused and the suspiciousness of his nature excited, the proposal to withdraw 6,000 troops from the garrison of Constantinople was peculiarly disagreeable to the Sultan. True, the garrison consisted of 15,000 picked and well-appointed men, and any ordinary observer might have thought more than 6,000 could have been easily spared until the ranks were filled up from the provinces; but such was not the mind of His Majesty. In these circumstances it was natural that he should lend a willing ear to the opponents of Said Pasha, who, for the cause already explained, were exceptionally numerous and active, and should accept the counsel of the timid spirits who advised him to undertake no action except with the express sanction of the Great Powers.* This course enabled the Sultan to avoid the withdrawal of troops from the garrison of Constantinople, and had the appearance of deference to the Great Powers. But in

* From the Blue Book we gather that the Sultan may also have been led astray by the ignorant delusion of the Russian Ambassador, who seems to have felt confident that he could by his influence alone extinguish the movement. On the 19th of September Sir W. White telegraphs to Lord Salisbury: "M. de Nélidoff has expressed himself as having taken steps most likely to put an end to this movement."—Blue Book, page 2.

its necessary delays it allowed to pass the only moment of action which was free from political complications, and an occasion was lost which would have proved invaluable to show the power of the Empire to act effectively and vigorously against local movements of lawlessness. In many respects the opportunity was peculiarly favourable. The necessary troops were in readiness, for the garrison of Constantinople was not only large, but it was also in excellent condition under able German officers. Further, the frontiers of Roumelia were in railway communication with the capital, and in forty-eight hours the whole contingent might have been transported to the capital of Roumelia. Money even, an important element in warfare, was not wanting, for Said Pasha, in his foresight, had assured himself of an immediate advance of £300,000. Had Turkey, therefore, been true to herself the Roumelian rising would only have proved a flash in the pan, harmless of future complications. Neglected opportunities are as fatal to nations as to individuals.

IV.

COMPLICATED GAME IN DIPLOMACY.

WHEN Turkey refused to avail herself of the right of military intervention accorded to, and indeed, by being provided for, enjoined upon her by the Treaty of Berlin, the whole situation was necessarily referred to the Great Powers of Europe, and *then* began a most remarkably complicated game in diplomacy in which England won easily by simply allowing the three Imperial Powers of Europe to exhaust their strength in vain efforts to accomplish the impossible. The game, however, was so interesting that it deserves a detailed description.

The present Czar has, of old standing, had a personal dislike to the Prince of Bulgaria, and in an autocratic Government like Russia this had naturally influenced her policy towards Bulgaria ever since the death of the late Czar. The Bulgarians, on their side, after they became free from direct Turkish rule, developed a "chauvinism" or jealousy of foreigners of the most extreme type, which led them to become daily more jealous of their Russian instructors. The Prince, placed between two opposing currents, that of the Russians desiring to extend their influence, and that of the Bulgarians to diminish it, inclined to or was constrained to follow the current of his people, and by so doing gave umbrage to the Russian element which sought to direct the destinies of the country. This had led the Russian agents in Bulgaria, a few weeks before the Roumelian rising, to address to the Czar severe strictures upon what they considered the disloyal conduct of the Prince of Bulgaria. Thus, of long date, personally ill-disposed towards the Prince, and furnished quite recently with what seemed to be authentic proofs of the Prince's infidelity to Russian aims, the Czar

was in no humour to regard with benevolence the Roumelian *coup d'état*. However much he might sympathize with the enlargement of Bulgaria in theory, he was opposed to it under the auspices of Prince Alexander, and could only approve of it if thereby Russian influence were consolidated in Bulgaria.*

Austria showed herself from the first decidedly opposed to accept the situation created by the Roumelian Unionists. Her only avowed motive of opposition was the necessity to enforce respect for the Treaty of Berlin, but we are safe in assuming that she participated in the alarm which the prospect of the union of Eastern Roumelia with Bulgaria caused in Servia and Greece. The solid square, of which I before spoke, once formed, the way of Austria and Servia to the Aegean became seriously threatened.† Thus Austria reasonably disliked the union.

Germany, true to her rôle as honest broker in Eastern affairs, sided with Russia and Austria without any direct interest except to preserve peace in Europe. The absence of the German Ambassador from Constantinople until the 1st of October placed her also at a disadvantage.

Italy and France did not count much in the question and expressed no decided opinions, but were ready to consult with the other Great Powers.‡

England had, however, to be counted with. And here I

* "About six weeks ago the Russian Political Agent at Sophia made overtures to certain members of the National Assembly offering to support a movement for Union, but on condition that Prince Alexander of Battenberg should be got rid of, and replaced by some one who would act more in accordance with Russian interests."—Dr. Stransky to Major Trotter, 21st September, Blue Book, page 65.

† That Austria was early preoccupied by this thought is evident from a conversation of Count Kalnoky with Sir A. Paget, on the 22nd September, four days after the *coup d'état*, in which the former said, "what appeared to him of even more pressing importance was to prevent the revolutionary movement spreading into Macedonia. The invasion of this province from Roumelia, or any rising there, might lead to the most momentous consequences."—Blue Book, page 8.

‡ This is confirmed by the Blue Book at pages 8 and 17.

must pay a well-merited tribute to the perspicacity with which Lord Salisbury judged the situation from the first moment of its presentation. It must not be thought that I say this from any spirit of party partiality. A long residence in the East, removed from the excitement of party struggles, has made me a very milk-and-water party man. Abroad, Englishmen become insensibly Imperialists and not party men. They watch what affects the power of our vast Empire, and follow more the Foreign than the Home policy of the country. But, in truth, no party spirit need enter into this question, for in our Roumelian policy both of the great political parties in England were worthily represented—Lord Salisbury as Conservative Foreign Minister, and Sir William White, our Minister at Constantinople, as a Liberal and a Cobdenite. When the Roumelian surprise burst upon the world Lord Salisbury was at Dieppe, and his first expression of opinion was penned from that Continental town, where he could not certainly have had intercourse with his colleagues. The statesmanlike clearness with which he at once gauged a very unexpected situation was very remarkable. One of the highest qualities of a General is military instinct, and Lord Salisbury is endowed in a very high degree with just instincts in Foreign policy. Loyalty to the Treaty of Berlin led him to consider it incumbent upon the Great Powers, without a moment's delay, to make a strong declaration in favour of the defence of that Treaty, but as the question was not one in which England could pretend to a direct interest, she was bound to secure the consent of Austria to whatever action was to be taken. The wisdom of this attitude was evident. Austria was in a position to support materially any policy she resolved upon, and she had every interest to seek the peace of Europe. Further, she professed the most friendly dispositions towards Turkey, and was more likely than any other Power to concert a basis of action with Russia. Lord Salisbury immediately proposed to the Great Powers to join his Government in a strong declaration to Bulgaria in support of the Treaty of

Berlin. Had this move been promptly acted upon, the way would have been cleared for the action of Turkey, and all hesitation on the part of the Sultan removed. But there was no longer a Gortchakoff at St. Petersburg, and vacillation is the especial characteristic of Austrian diplomacy. Nothing but talk came of the proposal.* The Great Powers not having followed his lead,† Lord Salisbury took no further initiative, and adopted a waiting policy, which secured him complete independence when later on the other Imperial Powers made a false move.

Fortunately, and we are not often so fortunate, the then Acting British Minister at Constantinople is our highest authority on the politics of Eastern Europe, and Sir William White combines in an extraordinary degree the invaluable diplomatic qualifications described in the phrase, "*Suaviter in modo, fortiter in re.*" Before the Turco-Russian War he had been attached to Lord Salisbury's Mission to Constantinople for his exceptional knowledge of Eastern politics, and thus when the Roumelian question arose, our interests, by a happy coincidence, were in the hands of two men who knew each other well. An astute diplomatist like Sir William White promptly perceived, as soon as the Turks threw away voluntarily their only chance of effective action, that the union of Eastern Roumelia and Bulgaria was an accomplished fact. Only force could destroy it, but where was that force to come from, when it did not come spontaneously from Turkey?

* The Blue Book shows us that the proposal was made on the morrow of the *coup d'état*, the 19th of September. Had it been acted on at once the declaration of the Great Powers would have appeared before Prince Alexander had left Bulgaria for Eastern Roumelia. On the 24th September Lord Salisbury telegraphs to Sir William White—"This proposal not having been agreed to I have made no further proposition since."—Blue Book, pages 2 and 14.

† On the 28th September Lord Salisbury writes of his proposal—"It was a step which in my judgment might have been of value if it had been taken at the very first practicable moment. The lapse of a few days had deprived such a measure of any possible utility."—Blue Book, page 32.

Could it be expected that Russia, the professed godfather of Bulgaria, would ever entrust Mussulman Turkey with the task of opposing the aspirations of the Bulgarian people? Had she done so she would have forfeited Bulgarian sympathies—indeed the sympathies of all the Christian populations in Eastern Europe. Her own military intervention in Roumelia would have added to that evil the enkindling of the suspicions of all the other Great Powers, and that Russia should allow Austria to intervene forcibly in Roumelia was not for a moment to be thought of. Thus, seeing that force could alone dissolve the union which had been proclaimed, and that no such force was available, it appeared to Sir William White that the only honourable solution for Europe and Turkey was that the latter should acknowledge the Prince of Bulgaria as the Governor-General of Eastern Roumelia, named, in conformity with the dispositions of the Treaty of Berlin, by the Sultan, and sanctioned by the Great Powers. The Prince had declared himself ready to accept such a solution,* and, approved by the Great Powers, the opposition of the smaller States of Servia and Greece was not to be dreaded.

But the personal antipathy of the Czar to the Prince of Bulgaria gave Russian policy a vindictive turn. She desired the deposition of Alexander, Prince of Bulgaria.† This the Prince adroitly met by declaring that he had no personal aims, and would be ready to retire if it were the wish of the Bulgarian people, and in the interest of the country which he had espoused. Here the question naturally arose, “Who is to do it?” “Who is to bell the cat?” and no one being found,

* “His Highness makes the solemn declaration,” in a telegram dated Sophia, 21st September, “that the union of the two provinces is effected without any hostile intention towards the Government of the Sultan, whose sovereignty he recognises.”—Blue Book, page 6.

† “The Russian Political Agent might even now at the last moment offer to recognise the union, provided that the Prince of Battenberg were got rid of. But all parties were now united in favour of the Prince. No one would listen to such overtures.”—Dr. Stranski to Major Trotter, Blue Book, page 66.

this childish piece of personal spite had to be abandoned. But the Czar, baulked in the execution of this greater indignity, proceeded to minor ones. He struck the name of the Prince out of the Russian army, in which he held the honorary rank of head of a regiment, and recalled from the service of Bulgaria all Russian officers. The Prince bore these lesser indignities with becoming composure, and their only effect was to make him more popular in Bulgaria.

All this time England was silent, and the wily diplomatist who represented her at Constantinople maintained an attitude of imperturbable but friendly inaction, both towards Turkey and the representatives of the Great Powers.*

At the suggestion of Russia it was agreed that a Conference of Ambassadors should be held at Constantinople. At that Conference Austria and Russia, backed by Germany, proposed as the only fitting solution of the problem a return pure and simple to the *status quo ante*—in other words, to the restoration of Turkish authority in Roumelia, and the re-installation of a Governor-General named by the Sultan and unconnected with Bulgaria. Thereupon our representative declared that before signing a Proctocol which engaged England it was necessary to determine by what means the decision of the Great Powers was to be enforced. Until this point was decided it was useless to proceed. This reasoning was irresistible, and after many deliberations it was agreed that the Porte should send a friendly Mission to communicate the wishes of the Great Powers to the Roumeliotes, and ascertain whether there was a

* This admirable diplomatic reserve is exhibited by one incident mentioned in the Blue Book. Sir William White writes to Lord Salisbury: "Hobart Pasha was very anxious to learn the views of Her Majesty's Government as regards the present crisis, and pressed me to give him at least my private opinion as to the best course for the Ottoman Government to pursue under the circumstances, but this I declined to do." Again, in speaking of a meeting of the Conference, Sir William White says to Lord Salisbury: "At the meeting to-day I maintained an attitude of great reserve, for the situation is extremely delicate."—Blue Book, pages 4 and 210.

likelihood of their acquiescence. As was to be expected, the Mission reported that such an acquiescence was not to be hoped for.*

* The Blue Book furnishes lengthened details of this remarkable Conference. It is most fittingly described by the expression, "The mountain was in labour and brought forth a mouse." In regard to the proposal of a return to the *status quo ante*, we find Lord Salisbury saying to the Austrian Ambassador, "If it were put forward as one of the bases on which the Conference should deliberate, Her Majesty's Government would have great difficulty in taking part in it unless the proposal was modified by some agreement as to the ulterior action to be taken."—Blue Book, page 148.

V.

SERVIA INTERVENES—DECLARES WAR ON BULGARIA.

MEANTIME, when it had become evident that the Conference was to prove an abortion, Servia, apparently unsolicited, rushed on the scenes with a declaration of war upon Bulgaria. This was made on the 14th of November, after the fourth meeting of the Conference at Constantinople, which had broken up without any result except the manifestation of the powerlessness of the Conference to arrive at any practical decision.

Early last year Bulgaria, on the pretext of holding a review, mobilized her troops, and Servia had answered by mobilizing hers, pretexting the strained relations between the two countries. Thus it happened that when the Roumelian rising occurred, both the Servian and Bulgarian armies were mobilized and in readiness. The relative strength of the two armies was 107,000 men for Servia, and 36,000 for Bulgaria. But besides its numerical superiority, the equipment of the Servian army was much more complete than that of the Bulgarian; and about a month before war was declared, Servia obtained about £800,000 from Vienna and Berlin bankers, while Bulgaria could procure and had obtained *no* money from abroad. Further, the withdrawal of all the Russians from the Bulgarian army rendered it deficient in officers.* In numeric power, therefore, as well as in equipment, money, and organization, the Servian army was greatly superior to that of Bulgaria.

* Colonel Trotter, in writing to Mr. Barrington on 19th September, says: "If the Emperor withdraws all the Russian officers from the Bulgarian and East Roumelian armies, their organization will to a great extent collapse, especially in Bulgaria, where all the superior officers, down to commanders of battalions, are Russians."—Blue Book, page 45.

Confident in these advantages, Servia declared war upon Bulgaria on flimsy pretences, but in reality because she feared the effect of the union of Eastern Roumelia with Bulgaria, and foresaw that the Great Powers lacked the means of preventing it. But it would be too naïve in us to see only Servia in this declaration of war. Servia is absolutely dependent upon Austria, and had the latter Power really wished to restrain her, she could have done so by a simple declaration. Nor would Servia ever have dreamed of attacking Bulgaria had she not been sure that her opponent would receive no help from Russia. We are therefore justified in assuming it as a certainty that Russia and Austria winked at the action of Servia, and thought that through that action they would succeed in attaining their object of restoring in Eastern Roumelia the *status quo ante*. When Servia had sufficiently humbled the Bulgarians, Russia was to interfere in favour of the latter, and would have delivered them on condition of the deposition of Prince Alexander.* In fact, Austria and Russia thought they had found Servia "to bell the cat."

* It is not to be expected that we should find this stated in the Blue Book, but we find that as early as the 26th of September Count Kalnoky said to Sir A. Paget that he "feared it will be impossible to re-establish the *status quo ante*," and under date of the 17th October we have a charming conversation between Sir E. Malet and Count Bismarck apropos of a question of the former, whether the Prince of Bulgaria would retire from East Roumelia on a simple invitation of the Great Powers. "Count Bismarck replied that M. de Giers had been of opinion that the Prince would, under the circumstances, obey the unanimous voice of Europe, and retire to Sophia. Count Bismarck had pointed out to M. de Giers the difficulty of the situation if the Prince refused and had asked what was to happen next, M. de Giers had replied, 'Alors les Puissances avisent.' " We see, therefore, plainly that Count Bismarck understood and gave M. de Giers to understand that the injunction of the Powers would not alone attain the object in view, and that something must happen next. The something which led Austria to insist with especial firmness two days before the declaration of war by Servia, on a policy which she had long admitted to be impossible, and which induced Russia to act similarly, was without doubt the "rod in pickle" at their disposal in Servia. How these Powers came to the conclusion at last that the rod must be employed is evident when we read the

Protocol of the Fourth Conference at Constantinople (Blue Book, page 290). At that Conference Turkey proposed the means of returning to the *status quo ante*, with a rider that when this was attained a Commission would examine the improvements required in the Constitution of East Roumelia. Italy, Austria, Russia, and Germany approved these means. Sir William White, in a masterly exposition, while promising to submit the Turkish proposals to this Government, expressed the opinion that the Commission to examine the improvements required in the Constitution of East Roumelia should *precede* the other measures proposed, and thus "effectively contribute to the security of the Empire, by having due regard to past experience, and the wishes of the people whose destiny is now under our consideration." The Austrian, Russian, and German Ambassadors refused to give priority to the inquiry, and in very strong terms declared that the wishes of the people are only a secondary consideration. Said Pasha said "he repudiated the expression 'wish of the population.' That expression is contrary to the conservative ideas which prevail in Europe." In the course of the discussion the Austrian Ambassador said: "We cannot set aside the facts which announce an approaching outbreak in the Balkan Peninsula, and still more serious complications than those which occupy us to-day, if we delay again the accomplishment of the important task devolving upon us." It was delayed, and the outbreak intimated by the Austrian Ambassador took place two days later by the Servian declaration of war.

VI.

SERVIA IS BEATEN, AND GAME IN DIPLOMACY RENEWED.

I HAPPENED to be in Cairo when the news came that Servia had declared war on Bulgaria, and it was thought very extraordinary when I expressed the opinion that Servia, if left alone, would not "bell the cat." On entering Bulgaria from Servia in the early days of September last year, about ten days before the East Roumelian *coup d'état*, I had been greatly struck with the difference between the Bulgarian and Servian peoples. The Bulgarians appeared to me to have more "physique"—more push—more "go," and are more industrious. In short, the Bulgarians are a hardy, persevering, obstinate race, while the Servians impressed me as being what we Scotchmen would call "fushonless creturs." The Bulgarians are essentially plebian and unsympathetic, because protrusively selfish, but I much mistake if their greater weight of body and character does not carry them further than any of the other races in Eastern Europe. Fresh from these impressions I could not help doubting the success of the Servians, if left alone.

It is useless for me to occupy your time in recounting in detail how fully my first impressions as to the Servians were confirmed by results. How the Prince of Bulgaria did honour to his Prussian military education, and with his almost unofficered army of stalwart peasants out-generalled the Servian invaders, must be in the memory of you all. The tactics of Servia were to attack, on the one side, what we called the Bulgarian wedge, and on the other, Widdin, on the Danube. Had she succeeded, the consequences were evident. She would have appropriated the wedge, and in that event she could have complacently accepted the union between lessened Bulgaria

and Eastern Roumelia, as no longer menacing her future hopes of Macedonia.* But “the best laid plans of men and mice gang aft agee.”

The division of the Servian attack deprived her army of much of its numerical superiority, for, leaving the garrison of Widdin to take care of itself, Prince Alexander directed all his efforts to repulse the invasion on the side of the Bulgarian wedge. The enthusiasm of a strong people fighting for fatherland compensated for any inferiority in numbers and defective organization. It was no war of artillery. The Bulgarians had little to boast of in that branch. They closed with their foes in hand-to-hand fight, and literally bayoneted them off the field. By irresistible brute force they drove them out of their territory, and promptly following up their success they carried the war into the enemies’ country and took possession of the important town of Pirot, some forty kilometres from the frontier. This was the work of only thirteen days from the declaration of war. The Servian army, which had advanced with presumption, was now demoralized and panic-stricken. A few days more and half of Servia might have been in the hands of the Bulgarian heroes. But at this point Austria interposed in behalf of the little State that was fighting her unavowed game, and declared to the Prince of Bulgaria that unless he consented to an armistice, he would find Austrian troops opposed to him.† After much negotiation the Prince

* Two significant despatches appear in the Blue Book. On the 6th of October Mr. Wyndham telegraphs: “I am informed that the Austrian Government is making endeavours to obtain a rectification of frontiers for Servia at the expense of the Bulgarian Principality in the direction of Widdin.” On the 16th of October the same Minister writes: “From information which has reached me from official sources it appears that Servia now hopes to obtain the cession from Bulgaria of what were formerly the Sandjaks of Widdin and Sophia.” This rectification, which Austria sought to accomplish by diplomacy, and Servia hoped for, was the declared aim of Servia in attacking Bulgaria, six weeks and a month after.—Blue Book, pages 57 and 169.

† Mr. Lascelles telegraphs on the 28th November: “The representatives of the three Empires received a telegram this evening from the Minister of Foreign

agreed to an armistice on condition that he was to be treated as victor and allowed to retain the Servian territory which he had conquered until the last Servian had quitted Bulgarian territory on the side of Widdin. He had repelled an unprovoked attack, had floored his enemy, seized him by the throat, and only released him when a Great Power which he could not pretend to withstand called "Hands off!"

During the two short weeks of this sharp but decisive struggle the sittings of the Conference at Constantinople had languished, and at last by mutual consent been suspended.* Great, of course, was the disappointment of Austria and Russia that Servia, far from having "belled the cat," had been "belled" herself. Meantime, in the struggle the union of Eastern Roumelia and Bulgaria had been cemented by blood. Side by side the two peoples had fought and died. What hope was there that a covenant so sealed and ratified could ever again be broken? The popularity of Alexander of Bulgaria had passed into hero-worship. He was justly regarded as the Saviour of the nation—her deliverer in the past, her hope in the future. The unpalatable truth that the union of Eastern Roumelia with Bulgaria was an accomplished fact could no longer be ignored, even by Austria and Russia.

The *status quo ante* ceased to be talked of. Austria set to work to assist in a reconciliation between the Porte and the Prince of Bulgaria. Russia gave a sulky assent. Then it was that the wisdom of the waiting policy adopted by England was demonstrated. Unfettered by all that had gone before, and

Affairs (Bulgarian), dated Pirot to-day, in which he stated that in view of the initiative taken by their Governments, and of the statement made to-day by Count Khevenhuller to Prince Alexander to the effect that if His Highness advanced further on Servian territory he would be met by Austrian troops, and taking into account the fact that the Bulgarian troops, by their victorious entry into Pirot, had vindicated the honour of his army, His Highness consented to cessation of hostilities and to negotiations for conditions of an armistice."—Blue Book, page 341.

* Blue Book, page 341.

uncompromised through his studied reserve, even when he saw clearly the impracticability of the policy which the three Empires were pursuing, our Minister at Constantinople was called upon to effect the reconciliation, and after long and patient negotiations Sir William White was enabled to bring about an arrangement between the Sultan and the Prince of Bulgaria whereby the latter was recognised as the Governor-General of Eastern Roumelia, named by the Sultan, and renewable by him every five years.* The Constitution of Eastern Roumelia was to be modified by a Commission to permit of the Bulgarian laws being extended to it, and the Prince of Bulgaria engaged to assist Turkey with his army against all foreign aggression. To this arrangement, with certain modifications, all the Great Powers have at length given their consent. It is thus to England, and not to Russia, that the Bulgarians feel they owe their *legal* union with Eastern Roumelia. Their *real* union they owe to their own bold initiative, the military prowess of their Prince, and their admirable bravery.

The pill was a bitter one to Russia, especially bitter because of the personal animosity which the Czar had shown to the Prince of Bulgaria. Where the shoe pinched the Russian foot may be gathered from the objections to the arrangement formulated by Russia. She objected to the Convention being concluded with Alexander of Battenberg as Prince of Bulgaria, and not simply with the Prince of Bulgaria whoever he might be. She objected to the renewal of the appointment every five years by the Sultan without the sanction of the Great Powers. Finally, she objected to the engagement of the Prince to assist

* The Blue Book shows that this counsel was communicated by Lord Salisbury to the Ottoman Ambassador as early as the 5th October. "I recommended," he said, "that His Majesty the Sultan should retain Prince Alexander (whose circumstances and disposition tended to make him more favourable to Turkey than any other occupant of the position the Porte would be likely to obtain), and should address himself to reducing the union of Bulgaria and Eastern Roumelia, so far as possible, to a merely personal union under the Prince."—Blue Book, page 80.

in repelling any aggression against Turkey.* On all these particulars Russia carried her point, and the Convention was accordingly modified, but no less truly has the union been legalized, to the satisfaction of Bulgarian aspirations and with the minimum of harm to Turkey. And in its accomplishment England scored a diplomatic triumph of the highest order, and such as we have had of late years few examples to record.

* Unfortunately, just as the arrangement was concluded with the Sublime Porte, Lord Salisbury's Government left office, and prematurely Sir Edward Thornton was allowed by the new Government to take possession of his post at Constantinople.

VII.

POSITION OF TURKISH PROVINCES OF EASTERN EUROPE—
NEEDED CONCESSION OF SELF-GOVERNMENT.

IN our Eastern Roumelian action we initiated what I conceive to be our true policy at present in Eastern Europe—a friendly sympathy, without alliance or partizanship, both with Mussulman Turkey and the rising Christian nationalities of Eastern Europe.

No man has more cause than I have to feel sympathy with the Mohainmedan people. I have amongst them most valued friends, with whom I have enjoyed relations of the most unreserved confidence. They have invariably accorded me a most gratifying consideration, and I have ever been able to return their regard with the most loyal heartiness.

But it would be culpable and childish in me to allow friendship to cloud my reason or shut my lips. The European provinces left to Turkey, excepting the Vilayet of Andrianople, cannot, *as at present administered*, be a strength to the Empire, nor other than a hotbed of foreign intrigue. To preserve his authority in Macedonia and Epirus the Sultan has recently been obliged to concentrate in these provinces an army of a quarter of a million of soldiers, drawn away exclusively from the Mohammedan populations of Asia Minor and Syria. But the financial resources and material condition of the Empire cannot stand such a strain, and before long the consequences will be felt from one end of the vast Empire to the other. To continue the present situation is impossible; to modify it without some radical change upon the past is equally impossible.

The ostensible cause of the recent military concentration was the attitude of Greece, but those who look below the surface cannot fail to perceive that there is a deeply seated cancer knawing the vitals of the provinces themselves in which the concentration has had to be made. There is no backbone of hearty allegiance to support *direct* Mussulman rule in these Christian provinces. Nothing can be conceived more discouraging than the present condition of Albania, Epirus, and part of Macedonia. So nominal is the executive power of the Porte in Albania that many of the legislative enactments of the Empire are *there* set openly at naught. In Epirus and part of Macedonia brigandage is so rife that a traveller cannot venture to remain two nights at the same station, lest his presence should organize a plan for his being plundered or held to ransom. This is not an exceptional condition. It has existed for years, and is now become chronic. The authorities are not wicked, but they are weak, and they have no loyalty in the people to lean upon for support. There is no disguising the fact that there will be no solid peace in the Ottoman provinces of South-Eastern Europe until *direct* Mussulman rule is withdrawn from them. The concentration of large military forces to keep off aggression is a process of certain exhaustion to the Empire; remove them, and free scope is left for foreign intrigue.

The only remedy for this embarrassing situation which sincere friendliness to the Ottoman Empire can suggest, I would express to Turkish statesmen as follows:—"Foresee the inevitable. Give some degree of administrative autonomy to your European provinces, and group them around you as friends. England had to do the same with Canada; she has had to do it with all her important colonies. You will thus disarm the foreign intriguers, who seek only to advance their personal aims by producing convulsions, and you will rear around you children who, deeply inoculated with the love of freedom, will refuse to be the slaves of aliens, the pawns in the game of Russia. Thus surrounded, your position at

Constantinople becomes assured. There is no danger to Constantinople from the races of Eastern Europe. Their ambitions are not towards that capital; on the contrary it is for their interest that Mussulman rule should continue in Constantinople. The only real danger for Turkish rule in Constantinople is from the great Northern Colossus."

Of the true policy for England there can be no doubt. It is candid friendliness to Turkey, and hearty sympathy with the rising nationalities of Eastern Europe. If ably carried out, that policy will ultimately border the north of the Mediterranean Sea with rising small States which would have enough of independence to prevent them being the catspaws of Russia, and in whose material prosperity British commerce would surely gain. Just before I went to Turkey, Roumania had achieved her freedom. In these thirty years her material prosperity has more than quintupled, and she is now little behind Italy in the standard of civilization. When I went to Turkey, brigandage was perhaps less rife in Epirus and Macedonia than it is to-day. The administration in these provinces was *then* bad, it is hardly improved *now*. "Look here upon this picture, and on this." Growth into a vigorous manhood, prosperity, and ever-increasing development: that is the one. Impaired vitality, constant unrest, pale-faced discontent: this is the other. And he who contemplates these two pictures cannot fail to desire a beginning of better things for the Turkish provinces of Eastern Europe, *in administrative self-government willingly accorded by the Sultan*. Through that means the Christian races of Eastern Europe may shake themselves free from the blighting influences of foreign intrigues, and instead of forming new Polands, grow up into self-contained, self-respecting centres of industry and contentment. To Mohammedan Turkey the gain will not be less important. Instead of the weakness resulting from continued military concentrations and financial exhaustion, she will create around her a bulwark of strength, defended by identic interests,

against her only external foe. She will further thereby execute with loyalty a promise which formed part of the Treaty of Berlin, and thus secure for herself the sympathy of those of the Great Powers of Europe who, with honest intentions, were parties to that International covenant.

LATEST PHASE OF THE EASTERN QUESTION.

IN publishing a lecture delivered three months ago, my readers may expect me to refer briefly to the more recent course of events concerning the countries of which I have treated.

Delay has arisen in the nomination of the Commissioners to whom was to be confided the task of regulating the new administrative conditions necessitated by the modifications introduced into the situation of Eastern Roumelia, but the Sublime Porte has wisely regarded with a generous benevolence the efforts of the Prince of Bulgaria to consolidate the interests of order and good government in the two provinces which are now united under him. This policy is highly significative of the wisdom of the Sultan and of the Ministers who now enjoy his confidence, and who, from personal knowledge I may add, are men of exceptional honesty and patriotism.

Time has only demonstrated with greater clearness the aims of Russian diplomacy. Irritated by the spirit of independence which led the Bulgarians to attain the expansion they coveted by their own efforts, Russia has tried to alienate the sympathies of the Sublime Porte from the Prince of Bulgaria; but thus far without result. By his Imperial utterance at Sebastopol, the Czar sought to alarm Bulgaria with the prospect of an impending vengeance, and by the reception of an address at Moscow which in distinct terms invited him to achieve the restoration of the noble edifice of St. Sophia in Stamboul to the purposes of a Christian sanctuary he wrought upon the fears of the Sultan in revealing the aspirations of his people. The wisdom of these demonstrations has not thus far been justified. Their only effect has been to show with more clearness to both

Turkey and Bulgaria that their only hope for the future is in mutual and sincere co-operation.

Yet another step has been taken during the last few days by Russia which has two significant aspects. She has retracted her promise, engrafted in the Treaty of Berlin, that Batoum in the Black Sea should remain a free port, and wiley profited by a temporary Governmental weakness in England to proclaim this retractation. Her first object in so doing is to counter-balance the moral effect of the diplomatic failure of her Eastern Roumelian policy. This first aspect of the step may be passed over with indifference. It is true that the promise now retracted was the *pont d'or* by which a dangerous gulph which separated England and Russia at the Conference of Berlin was crossed. But the freedom of the Port of Batoum had never any greater value than as an honourable escape from a difficulty for which it was not advantageous to endanger greater interests. If the withdrawal of that freedom should serve as a satisfaction to Russian *amour propre*, it may be as useful, albeit in a lesser degree, as its promise was before. But the second aspect of the recent Russian declaration is more momentous. It implies the little value Russia attaches to the Treaty of Berlin, and, in no unmistakeable manner, warns all concerned with herself in that Treaty, that its dispositions are in *her* eyes of ephemeral interest. This is no new revelation to those who have followed the story of the preceding pages, but it ought to prove useful as a more emphatic declaration of the real aim of Russia. She lost her hold over Roumania because the Roumanians found a wise German Prince under whose constitutional rule they could develop their resources and create for themselves a position of independent national life. She sees clearly that Bulgaria hopes and promises to do the same under *its* German Prince, and she would fain crush in the bud this future danger. She is trying to alienate the sympathies of the Bulgarians from their Prince by showing them that that attachment will bring down upon them Russian vengeance. But the mass of

the Bulgarians are much too thick-skinned to be affected by threats, and one of their most distinguishing characteristics is dogged persistence. The words of Dr. Stransky to Major Trotter may be cited as expressing the general sentiment of the Bulgarian people. "A constant intrigue," he said, "has been going on against him" (the Prince), "by the Russians, because he shows independence; but we will stand by him, as he has shown himself to be a constitutional Prince during the last two years."* Or again, "The Prince," said Dr. Stranski, "had now definitely thrown in his lot with the Bulgarians, who would therefore support him through thick and thin."† The aberration of Russian diplomacy is as great to-day on this point as it was when, on the morrow of the Roumelian *coup d'état*, M. De Nélidoff expressed himself to Sir William White as "having taken steps most likely to put an end to this movement, which probably has for its object the union of Bulgaria and Eastern Roumelia."‡ Nothing can restore Russian supremacy in Bulgaria but the march of Russian troops into that country to dethrone Prince Alexander, and this she is not likely to venture upon as long as Germany supports Austria in her Eastern policy. Could Russia succeed in inducing the Sultan to quarrel with Bulgaria and oppose forcibly Prince Alexander, her aim would most easily be attained, but of this there is not the slightest chance. The Sultan and his Ministers are perfectly alive to the imprudence of such a course, and as long as England maintains any influence at Constantinople Russian efforts in that direction should prove unavailing. But as Russia must already be convinced of the futility of such efforts she will work towards the gradual exhaustion of Turkey. To this end, by inspiring the Sultan with distrust of the Prince of Bulgaria, Russia induces Turkey to maintain the expensive military concentra-

* Blue Book, page 50.

† Blue Book, page 65.

‡ Blue Book, page 2.

tion of troops in Macedonia and Thrace,—thus gradually but surely bringing about the financial and material ruin of the Ottoman Empire. An important step of Russian diplomacy in preparation for the last Russo-Turkish War was inducing Turkey to alienate European and especially British sympathy by a needlessly offensive repudiation of her foreign debt. It will endeavour to do so again by producing another financial deadlock. It is as sure as that two and two make four that this will be the consequence of the prolonged continuation of the present military expenditure in Turkey. And it is for this reason of vital importance to the Sublime Porte that it should find a means of disarmament with honour to itself, and without danger to its Imperial power.

The only means to attain this efficaciously is to calm the discontent in its European Provinces by granting them a large measure of self-government, and to do this promptly and spontaneously. Fortunately the mechanism of that self-government is already prepared. Four years ago a Commission of Ottoman and European delegates elaborated a scheme of administration for the Provinces in question, and it only requires the approval of the Sultan to put it into operation. In that scheme the financial and imperial interests of the Porte were carefully protected as well as the interests of the European creditors of Turkey. The scheme is little known, but I can speak of it with some authority, for during its elaboration I was frequently consulted by the British Delegate on questions affecting the interests of the European creditors.

Of one thing the Sultan may be assured, that the races of South-Eastern Europe prefer to remain attached to the Ottoman Empire rather than become the prey of foreign despots. And their preference is a just one. For there is more certainty of individual freedom and a congenial administration in connection with the Porte than with any foreign Government.

The spontaneous concession of a certain measure of self-government to his European provinces would range with loyalty

around the throne of the Sultan their various populations, enable His Imperial Majesty without misgiving to send back to their homes in Asia Minor and Syria the vast army which is at present concentrated in European Turkey, and assure to his cause the sympathies of freedom-loving countries such as England, France, and Italy.

Should the Sultan not adopt this wise and magnanimous course, it needs no gift of prophecy to warn His Majesty that the forcible severance of his European Provinces by foreign intervention is only a question of time, and in that case his position at Constantinople will become untenable. "Aide-toi et le ciel t'aidera."

In England we have reason to be proud of the generous policy initiated by Lord Salisbury in connection with Eastern Roumelia. It is worthy of a great nation, and it is our duty to continue that policy with a calm but resolute determination. The difficulties of our Home policy have led Russia to believe that she can dare much with impunity, but when the public opinion in England is sufficiently enlightened to grasp clearly the present situation in Eastern Europe and the grave importance of its issues upon British interests, the weakness of our Executive position will be mitigated by the growth of a strong popular sentiment. It has been in the desire to contribute something to the creation of such a popular sentiment that the preceding observations have been penned, and if, even in the very humblest degree, they tend to attract general attention to an important event happily consummated in Eastern Roumelia, and to the latest phase of what is called "The Eastern Question," their intention will have been attained.



